

# **RCN Congress Constitution**

## **Title**

1. The RCN Congress.

## **Purpose**

2. To promote the objects of the RCN as laid down in the Royal Charter.
3. To promote all aspects of the profession of nursing.
4. To express views and opinions on matters of importance to nurses and the nursing profession.
5. To express views and opinions, and influence the health services the nursing profession provides to the people of the United Kingdom.
6. To express views and opinions, and influence health care policy for the people of the United Kingdom.
7. To be involved in international matters relating to nurses, nursing and health care.
8. To exert political pressure to further these aims.
9. To participate in and influence the policy making agenda of Council.
10. To express views and opinions, and influence the organisation of the RCN.
11. To recommend action by Council and national entities.
12. To initiate immediate action subject to the agreement of Council members present and meeting in formal session.
13. To provide a variety of educational opportunities for nurses.
14. To facilitate membership networking.

## **Convening meetings of Congress**

15. A meeting of RCN Congress will be held at least once in every calendar year.
16. It is the responsibility of the General Secretary to give at least 28 clear days notice of the date, time and place of the meeting.

## **Meetings**

17. The Rules of Congress are applied by the Chair to guide the meeting.
18. Having previously been proposed by Council and accepted by Congress the Rules shall remain in force until changes to them are agreed in accordance with the procedure for amending them as set out in the Rules of Congress.
19. At the start of each Congress the Chair will announce when the Rules are in force.
20. Branches, National Forums, the RCN Students Committee, the UK Stewards Committee, the UK Safety Representatives Committee and the UK Learning Representatives Committee will receive interim progress reports from Council on work arising as a result of debates and the outcomes of voting during Congress.

## **Attendance and speaking**

21. All RCN members (full, student and associate), have the right to attend and speak on any matter before Congress.
22. RCN members employed by the RCN at the time Congress takes place are permitted to speak only by invitation from the Chair.

## **Submitting Entities**

23. The submitting entities recognised by Council are:
  - Branches
  - National Forums
  - The RCN Students Committee
  - The UK Stewards Committee
  - The UK Safety Representatives Committee
  - The UK Learning Representatives Committee
  - The Council
  - The RCN Boards
24. Each submitting entity is entitled to submit items (resolutions or matters for discussion) to the Agenda Committee for selection as agenda items for debate.
25. Submitting entities may be called upon to assist in work to further the agenda items passed by Congress.
26. The General Secretary may also submit items, in order to facilitate the business of Congress.

## **Voting**

27. Submitting entities are entitled to voting members as follows:
  - a. Branches are represented on the basis of one voting member for every 1000 members or part thereof.
  - b. National Forums are represented on the basis of one voting member for every 1000 members or part thereof up to a total of six.
  - c. The UK Stewards Committee has seven voting members.
  - d. The UK Safety Representatives Committee has seven voting members.
  - e. The RCN Students Committee has six voting members.
  - f. The UK Learning Representatives Committee has seven voting members.
28. The voting members of each submitting entity will be recorded at the time of registration for Congress.
29. A voting member must be a member of the submitting entity and in full, student or associate category of the RCN.
30. A voting member is entitled to represent one submitting entity only at any one time.
31. The following submitting entities and elected officers are not entitled to vote.

The Council  
The Chair and Vice Chair of Congress (except that the Chair of Congress has a casting vote in the event of a second equality of votes)  
The Agenda Committee
32. Employees of the RCN are not entitled to vote.

## **Chair and Vice Chair of Congress**

33. The Chair and Vice Chair will be full members of the RCN. Any member who has been registered as attending Congress on at least two occasions in the four previous years is eligible to stand for election.
34. They will not hold office in any other United Kingdom membership nursing organisation or any United Kingdom health service trade union.
35. The elections of Chair and Vice Chair will take place by postal ballot every two years. If applicable, the single transferable method will be used to count votes.

36. The elections will take place within and not more than three months after Congress in an election year.
37. The separate elections for Chair and Vice Chair of Congress will be conducted at the same time.
38. The outgoing Chair may work with the newly elected Chair for not more than two months to ensure continuity of the work of Congress and the Agenda Committee.
39. The Chair and Vice Chair are each eligible for re-election for one further consecutive 2 year term of office.
40. No person who has held each office twice within an eight year period will be eligible for a further and final term of office until a two year period has elapsed.
41. The following submitting entities may nominate candidates for the election of Chair and Vice Chair:
  - Branches
  - National Forums
  - The RCN Students Committee
  - The UK Stewards Committee
  - The UK Safety Representatives Committee
  - The UK Learning Representative Committee
42. The submitting entities listed at paragraph 41 are entitled to cast votes in the election of Chair and Vice Chair, on the basis of the number of voting members they are allowed, as set out in paragraph 27 of this Constitution.

### **Mid Term Vacancy: Chair of Congress**

43. If a vacancy occurs the Agenda Committee will recommend one of the following actions:
  - a. that the Vice Chair takes over the remaining portion of the vacated term
  - or
  - b. that an election is held. The person newly elected will take over the remaining portion of the vacated term. Paragraphs 33, 34, 40, 41, and 42 of this Constitution will be applied in the election, which will be conducted by postal ballot. If applicable, the single transferable method will be used to count votes.
44. The Vice Chair chosen by the Agenda Committee or a member elected to take over a term of office as Chair is eligible to stand for election as Chair of Congress for two further consecutive two year terms. The exception is when two Congress meetings have occurred during the shortened term of office. This will be considered a full term of office.

## **Mid Term Vacancy: Vice Chair of Congress**

45. If a vacancy occurs in the office of Vice Chair the Agenda Committee will choose one of their members to take over the remaining portion of the vacated term.
46. The Vice Chair chosen by the Agenda Committee to take over a term of office is eligible to stand for election as Vice Chair of Congress for two further consecutive two year terms. The exception is when two Congress meetings have occurred during the shortened term of office. This will be considered a full term of office.

## **The Agenda Committee**

47. The Agenda Committee consists of :

Chair of Congress  
Vice Chair of Congress  
Chair of Council  
Four members elected by Congress  
General Secretary (non voting)

48. The powers and functions of the Agenda Committee are:
  - a. To receive agenda items (resolutions and matters for discussion) from the following submitting entities:  
  
Branches  
National Forums  
The RCN Students Committee  
The UK Stewards Committee  
The UK Safety Representatives Committee  
The UK Learning Representatives Committee  
The Council  
The RCN Boards
  - b. To redraft agenda items subject to the agreement of the submitting entity.
  - c. To combine agenda items subject to the agreement of the submitting entities.
  - d. To determine the agenda items for debate during Congress.
  - e. To reject other agenda items.
  - f. To determine the order in which agenda items will be debated during Congress.
  - g. To review the progress of business during Congress and guide members about timing.

- h. To receive and consider emergency agenda items for debate at Congress.
  - i. To receive and consider amendments to agenda items during Congress.
  - j. To be available as a source of advice to members regarding the business of Congress.
49. The General Secretary may also submit items, in order to facilitate the business of Congress.

### **Election to the Agenda Committee**

50. Any member who has been registered as attending Congress on at least two occasions in the four previous years is eligible to stand for election.
51. The election takes place during Congress in an election year. If applicable, the single transferable method will be used to count votes.
52. Nomination papers must be signed by a voting member from any 3 of the following recognised submitting entities:
- Branches
  - National Forums
  - The RCN Students Committee
  - The UK Stewards Committee
  - The UK Safety Representatives Committee
  - The UK Learning Representatives Committee
53. The term of office is two years and members are eligible for election for one further consecutive two year term but no more until a two year period has elapsed. They will then be eligible to stand for election for one further term only.
54. The first mid term vacancy among the four members of the Agenda Committee is filled by the person who received the next highest number of votes. This person takes over the remainder of the vacant term.
55. The Agenda Committee has the power to nominate persons to fill any further mid term vacancies. These require ratification by Council.
56. A member of the Agenda Committee who has taken over a term of office is eligible to stand for election to the Agenda Committee for two further consecutive two year terms. The exception is when two Congress meetings have occurred during the shortened term of office. This will be considered a full term of office.
57. Elected members of the Agenda Committee attend Congress to fulfil their role and have the same rights and privileges as other members except that they are not eligible to vote.

58. Members of the Agenda Committee may not serve concurrently on Council, UK Stewards, UK Safety Representatives Committees, or UK Learning Representatives Committees, or any forum steering committee.

### **Amendments to the Constitution**

59. This Constitution remains in force until it is amended by a proposal passed by a majority of two-thirds of members present and voting at Congress, and ratified by Council.

60. The following submitting entities have the right to propose and second amendments to the Congress Constitution:

Branches

National Forums

The RCN Students Committee

The UK Stewards Committee

The UK Safety Representatives Committee

The UK Learning Representatives Committee

61. Voting members of the submitting entities listed at paragraph 60 above may propose amendment of the Constitution using a procedural item card. This must be seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity listed at paragraph 60 above.
62. If carried by the RCN Congress it is then submitted to Council in formal session for ratification.
63. Council may also propose an amendment and if carried by RCN Congress it becomes immediately effective.

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# **Rules of RCN Congress**

## **Quorum**

1. 150 voting members must be present.

## **Conduct of meeting**

2. The conduct of the meeting rests with the Chair.
3. Seating arrangements will be detailed in the Congress brochure, and members should ensure they are seated in the correct area.
4. Distribution of papers and publications in the debating hall is not permitted without the express permission of the Chair.

## **Order of business**

5. The times of starting and adjourning each session will be set out in the order of business.
6. The order and timing of business can be varied at any time with the agreement of a majority of voting members.

## **Report of Last Congress**

7. All members who register to attend Congress will receive a report of the last Congress.
8. Discussion on the report will be limited to matters of accuracy.

## **Report of Council**

9. Congress will receive a report from Council, which will include information about action taken on items debated at the last Congress.
10. Members may ask questions on the report of Council, but a continuation of the previous year's debates will not be allowed. If Congress feels that an item from a previous year is of such importance that it requires further debate, then it should be submitted as a draft emergency agenda item for consideration by the Agenda Committee.

## **Agenda Committee Reports**

11. The Agenda Committee will report regularly in the following ways:
  - (i) The First Report, covering all meetings of the Committee since the last Congress, will be printed in the Congress brochure.
  - (ii) The Second Report, arising from the Agenda Committee meeting immediately before Congress, will be presented following consideration of the first report.
  - (iii) Subsequent reports from meetings during Congress will be presented at appropriate times throughout the week.

## **Agenda Items**

12. All agenda items are within the control of the meeting, and may only be withdrawn with the agreement of a majority of voting members.
13.
  - (i) Resolutions and matters for discussion must be proposed by a voting member from the submitting entity, and resolutions must be seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution.
  - (ii) In the case of Council and the RCN Boards, agenda items will normally be proposed by the Chair or Vice Chair, and resolutions will normally be seconded by another member of Council or the Board. Agenda items submitted by the General Secretary will normally be proposed by the General Secretary.
  - (iii) The proposer (and seconder) will set the scene for the ensuing debate, and may therefore present different facets of the arguments for and against the item.
  - (iv) Resolutions will require a majority of voting members to be carried; there will be no vote on matters for discussion.
  - (v) At the conclusion of debate on a resolution or matter for discussion the proposer will have the right of reply. The right of reply is to sum up and clarify points raised in the debate. New information must not be introduced.

## **Emergency agenda items**

14. Emergency agenda items normally refer to an issue that has arisen since the closing date for the receipt of agenda items. They may be submitted to the Agenda Committee at any time after the closing date, either before or during the course of Congress. Congress receives from the Agenda Committee recommendations on emergency agenda items for inclusion on the agenda, and their position on the agenda.

15. (i) Emergency agenda items can be submitted by any submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution.  
  
(ii) Emergency agenda items submitted from the floor will require to be seconded by a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution.  
  
(iii) Emergency agenda items must be submitted and proposed by a voting member from the submitting entity, and resolutions must be seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution. In the case of Council and the RCN Boards, paragraph 13 (ii) relating to agenda items applies.  
  
(iv) All emergency agenda items will require the agreement of a majority of voting members in order to be accepted onto the agenda.

### **Amendments to agenda items**

16. An agenda item may be amended by a proposal which:
  - (a) removes words
  - (b) adds words
  - (c) replaces words
17. An amendment must not change an agenda item so that its original purpose is lost.
18. Amendments should, whenever possible, be submitted in writing to the Agenda Committee in advance of Congress or during the course of Congress. Amendments may also be proposed from the floor, using a Procedural Item card.
19. The Chair will decide whether the amendment is relevant and whether it should be put to the vote.
20. An amendment must be proposed by a voting member of a submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution, and seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution. To be accepted, an amendment will require the agreement of a majority of voting members.
21. Once an amendment has been proposed and seconded, no further amendments can be proposed until the vote on that amendment has been taken.
22. Once an amendment has been accepted, the agenda item is amended immediately and replaces the previous version.

### **Procedural Items**

23. Procedural Item cards may only be used by voting members of submitting entities, as defined in the Congress Constitution. The Chair will recognise the procedural item card at an appropriate time, and will decide whether a procedural item is put to the vote. The Chair may ask the proposer of the procedural item to clarify the reasons for its introduction, and will take into consideration views from the floor.
24. A procedural item must be proposed by a voting member of a submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution, and seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution. To be passed, a procedural item will require the agreement of a majority of voting members.
25. Procedural items are:

**(a) To proceed to next business;**

Before a vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item.

The vote on the procedural item is then taken.

If passed, the proposer has a right of reply to the agenda item. Discussion on the agenda item then ends immediately. No vote is taken on the agenda item.

If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

**(b) That the vote is taken;**

Before a vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item.

The vote on the procedural item is then taken.

If passed, the proposer has a right of reply to the agenda item. Discussion on the agenda item then ends immediately, and the vote on the agenda item is taken.

If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

**(c) To adjourn the debate;**

Before a vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item.

The vote on the procedural item is then taken.

If passed, the current debate is then adjourned, to be concluded at a later time during Congress.

If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

**(d) To refer the agenda item to Council for further consideration;**

Before a vote is taken, the proposer of the agenda item has a right to speak on the procedural item.

The vote on the procedural item is then taken.

If passed, the proposer of the agenda item has a right of reply to the agenda item. Debate then stops and the agenda item is referred to Council for further consideration.

If lost, debate on the agenda item resumes.

**(e) To change the order of agenda items.**

Before a vote is taken on the procedural item, the proposer of the procedural item must specify the new order of agenda items.

If passed, the new order of agenda items will take effect.

If lost, the order of agenda items remains unchanged.

## **Points Of Order**

26. A point of order card is used to challenge the conduct of the meeting, or to seek clarification from the Chair. As soon as the Chair sees a point of order card, anyone speaking may be interrupted.
27. Point of order cards may be used by anyone who is registered and attending Congress.

## **Speaking**

28. Speakers will first state their name and whether they are:
  - (a) Attending as a voting member of a submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution;or
  - (b) Attending as a non-voting member.
29. All speakers will address their remarks to the Chair.

## **Voting**

30. Changes to the Congress Constitution and these Rules require a two-thirds majority. All other votes require a majority.

31. Votes will be cast and counted using an electronic system. In the event of a system failure, the Chair will determine an alternative method to be used.
32. In the case of an equality of votes, a second vote will immediately be taken. If there is still an equality of votes, the Chair will have a casting vote.

### **Time Limits**

33. The time for debating an agenda item will be 25 minutes. Proposers of agenda items will be allocated 5 minutes. All subsequent speakers on an agenda item will be allocated 2 minutes. Persons invited by the Chair to provide supplementary information will be allocated 5 minutes. The proposer of any agenda item will be allocated 2 minutes for the right of reply.

### **Varying time limits**

34. Voting members of submitting entities, as defined in the Congress Constitution, may propose a variation to time limits using a procedural item card. This must be seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution. To be passed, the variation to time limits will require the agreement of a majority of voting members.
35. The Chair may, exceptionally, grant an extension of time to a speaker.

### **Visitors**

36. The Agenda Committee will approve and report to Congress the names of visitors attending the meeting.
37. Accredited members of the press/media will be admitted to the meeting.

### **Temporary Chair**

38. In the absence of the Chair of Congress, the Vice-Chair may preside, or the Chair of Council and members of the Agenda Committee will recommend to Congress the appointment of a temporary Chair.

### **Suspension of these Rules**

39. Voting members of submitting entities, as defined in the Congress Constitution, may propose the temporary suspension of any of these Rules using a procedural item card. This must be seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity, as defined by the Congress Constitution. The Agenda Committee may also recommend, in its reports to Congress, the temporary suspension of any of these

Rules. To be passed, the suspension of any Rule will require the agreement of a majority of voting members.

### **Amendment of these Rules**

40. These Rules remain in force until they are amended by a proposal passed by a majority of two-thirds of members present and voting at Congress, and ratified by Council.
41. The following submitting entities have the right to propose or second amendments to the Rules:  
  
Branches  
National Forums  
The RCN Students Committee  
The UK Stewards Committee  
The UK Safety Representatives Committee  
The UK Learning Representatives Committee
42. Voting members of the submitting entities listed at paragraph 41 above may propose amendment of the Rules using a procedural item card. This must be seconded by a voting member of a different submitting entity listed at paragraph 41 above.
43. Council may also propose an amendment to the Rules, and if passed by Congress it becomes immediately effective.

# Glossary of Terms in Congress Constitution and Rules

Abstentions	The number of people abstaining from a vote is displayed on the screen after each vote, along with those voting for and against. However, when calculating the percentage votes for and the percentage votes against a resolution, any abstentions are not included in these percentages. This is because abstentions are not votes.
Agenda Items	Items formulated as either resolutions or matters for discussion are submitted to the Agenda Committee for consideration. The Agenda Committee decide which items to recommend for inclusion in the agenda, which is then submitted to Council for formal ratification.
Constitution	This is the key document that defines what Congress is, its purpose, what it can do, and who can take part. It also sets out the role of the Agenda Committee and the rules for electing the Chair and Vice Chair of Congress and the Agenda Committee.
Emergency Agenda Items	Emergency items normally refer to an issue that has arisen since the closing date for the receipt of agenda items. They may be submitted to the Agenda Committee at any time after the closing date, either before or during the course of Congress. The Agenda Committee will recommend which of these emergency items will be debated, and their position on the agenda during the week.
Matter for Discussion	This is an item worded just to raise an issue for discussion in the Congress arena - it seeks views rather than action.
Non-voting member	A member who may speak in debates and raise points of order, but who may not vote, nor propose or second any item (including amendments and procedural items).
Resolution	This is an item whose wording indicates that specific action should be taken - for example an item that 'urges Council' to take action on an issue.
Rules	The Congress Rules set out the rules for running the meeting. They are the rules that the Chair uses to make sure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible, for the benefit of all those at the meeting. All members attending the meeting should understand and follow these rules, so that everyone taking part gets as much as possible out of Congress.

Single  
Transferable  
Vote

This is the method now used by the RCN and most other comparable organisations to conduct elections. The method ensures that the successful candidates have the confidence of the majority, by letting members *number* the candidates in the order of their preference, instead of using X votes. If any candidate is the first choice of enough voters (a quota is calculated when the number of valid votes is known), she/he is elected. For subsequent places, or if no candidate achieves election on the basis of first preferences, each vote for the candidate with the fewest “1's” is transferred to whichever of the remaining candidates is marked as the next choice on each ballot paper - as if a second ballot were being held with the bottom candidate eliminated.

Voting

There are two types of majority:

*Simple majority* - means that to be passed, more than half (50%+) of the total number of voting members present must register a vote in favour.

*Two-thirds majority* - means that to be passed, at least two thirds (66.6%) of the total number of voting members present must register a vote in favour.

Voting member

A member attending with voting rights for a particular branch, forum or other entity.